

VZCZCXRO1798

OO RUEHDBU RUEHFL RUEHKW RUEHLA RUEHNP RUEHROV RUEHSL RUEHSR

DE RUEHRL #1508/01 3311852

ZNY CCCCC ZZH

O 271852Z NOV 09

FM AMEMBASSY BERLIN

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 5907

INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD PRIORITY 0554

RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL PRIORITY 0678

RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

RHEHNSC/NSC WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

RHMFISS/HQ USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE PRIORITY

RHMFISS/HQ USAFE RAMSTEIN AB GE PRIORITY

RHMFISS/CDRUSAREUR HEIDELBERG GE PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BERLIN 001508

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/27/2019

TAGS: PREL MARR MOPS NATO PGOV GM AF

SUBJECT: HEADS ROLL AT MOD WITH NEW REVELATIONS ON KUNDUZ
AIR STRIKE

REF: BERLIN 1107

Classified By: ACTING POLITICAL MINISTER COUNSELOR STAN OTTO. REASONS:
1.4 (B) AND (D).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Revelations that the German MOD failed to pass along or deliberately withheld reports about civilian casualties caused in the September 4 Kunduz air strike have reignited a political storm in Berlin, leading in quick succession to the resignations of the German Chief of Defense and a MOD state secretary, as well as new Labor Minister Jung, who was Defense Minister at the time. New Defense Minister zu Guttenberg is desperately trying to close off the possibility of a parliamentary inquiry -- which could drag on for months -- by promising the Bundestag full disclosure of all information and documents related to the attack. However, zu Guttenberg himself is vulnerable on this issue: he announced recently, after reviewing the NATO investigatory report, that while procedural errors had been made, the German PRT commander had no choice but to order the air strike given the threat posed by the fuel tankers. MFA and MOD fear that this episode could have a chilling effect on all those involved in the Afghanistan deployment and reinforce risk avoidance. There is also a concern that this could lead the opposition Social Democrats and Greens to be even less receptive to a reconsideration of a German troop increase after the proposed Afghanistan Conference in January. It remains unclear who will replace GEN Schneiderhan, who had the distinction of being the longest-serving Chief of Defense in Bundeswehr history. END SUMMARY.

REVELATIONS DISCREDIT PREVIOUS CLAIMS

¶2. (C) For days after the September 4 air strikes, then-Defense Minister Jung steadfastly maintained that all the evidence at his disposal indicated that only insurgents and their collaborators had been killed in the attack against the two hijacked fuel tankers. While that stance was criticized from the very start as being implausible, a story in the November 25 German daily newspaper BILD revealed that Jung clearly should have known better than to make such definitive assertions. It turns out that German Regional Command (RC) North reported to Berlin immediately after the air strike that several underage children, including one as young as 10 years old, had been brought to the PRT Kunduz hospital for treatment and that the bodies of two teenagers had been recovered. RC-North also reported to MOD that Taliban fighters had stormed a local mosque and forced several local villagers at gunpoint to help them pull the stranded fuel tankers out of a riverbed. It was noted that 14 of these Afghan civilians were still missing and presumed

killed in the air strike.

¶ 3. (C) According to MOD sources, Bundeswehr Inspector General GEN Wolfgang Schneiderhan immediately offered his resignation after the BILD story appeared, taking responsibility for MOD's apparent failure to present all the information it had available to the public, the Bundestag and the public prosecutor investigating possible criminal charges against the PRT commander. Defense Minister zu Guttenberg then reportedly forced MOD State Secretary Peter Wichert, the highest-ranking civilian official responsible for overseas deployments, to resign as well. At first, Jung resisted stepping down from his post as the new Labor Minister, claiming that he had not read the RC-North reports in question and therefore had not intentionally misled the public or parliament. However, after failing to make a convincing case in the Bundestag, he finally resigned as well on November 27. Jung's critics argued that his ministerial performance was simply indefensible -- either he had deliberately withheld the information or he had not properly managed his ministry to process and take account of the incoming reports.

IMPLICATIONS

¶ 4. (C) MFA ISAF Action Officer Lukas Wasielewski gave a down-beat assessment of the likely political fall-out from these recent developments. He thought it was inevitable that it would have a chilling effect on all those involved in the Afghanistan deployment and reinforce risk avoidance. This was especially true if the Greens and the Left Party

BERLIN 00001508 002 OF 002

succeeded in their demands for a formal parliamentary inquiry, which could drag on for months. He was also afraid the episode would further sour the public and parliamentarians on overseas deployments and on ISAF in particular. While he thought the opposition Social Democrats would continue to support a simple roll-over of the parliamentary mandate for Bundeswehr participation in ISAF when it comes to a vote on December 4, he was concerned that they would now be far less receptive to a reconsideration of a troop increase after the proposed Afghanistan Conference in late January.

¶ 5. (C) MOD ISAF Action Officer LTC Dirk Hamann cited similar concerns, but noted that the departure of Schneiderhan, who had been extremely risk averse and conservative in his approach to operations in Afghanistan, could lead to some positive changes in the longer run. He cited, for example, the possibility of greater flexibility for German training teams (OMLTs) embedded with Afghan National Army units, whose movements are currently restricted by stringent medical evacuation and force protection requirements.

SCHNEIDERHAN SUCCESSOR NOT CLEAR

¶ 6. (C) Schneiderhan's sudden departure brings to an ignominious close what had been a distinguished and unprecedented military career. Appointed Inspector General in 2002, Schneiderhan, 63, was the longest-serving Chief of Defense (CHOD) in the history of the Bundeswehr, having been extended in that position in each of the last three years beyond the normal mandatory retirement age of 60. He had a reputation for being extremely cautious and politically astute, so the circumstances of his downfall come as a shock to those who have followed his career.

¶ 7. (C) Admiral Wolfram Kuehn, commander of the Bundeswehr Joint Support Forces, has replaced Schneiderhan as the acting Inspector General and is one of the leading candidates to succeed him. Kuehn is very familiar with the U.S., having attended both the U.S. Naval Postgraduate School and the National War College. MOD sources say the other CHOD candidates include LTG Volker Wieker, deputy commander of the 1st German/Dutch Corps, and LTG Rainer Glatz, commander of

the Bundeswehr Operations Command, responsible for all overseas deployments. Wicker had been the leading candidate to become the next Inspector General before Schneiderhan was most recently extended in the position. It now seems less likely that Wicker will get the job since he just began a one-year assignment as ISAF Chief of Staff and is not scheduled to return from Afghanistan until October 2010.

MURPHY